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SUBJECT: Argentina Unlikely to Associate with Copenhagen Accord by January 31

REF: 10 STATE 3079

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¶1. (U) Summary: Emboffs discussed reftel with Samuel Basualdo of the Argentine Foreign Ministry's Climate Change Office and Gabriel Blanco of the Environment Secretariat's Climate Change Division several times over the last week. The GoA does not appear positively inclined to associate with the Accord, especially by the January 31 deadline. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) When ESTHoff delivered the demarche to the Foreign Ministry on January 20, Basualdo said that no decision has yet been made on the Accord but that Argentina has several concerns about the legal implications of the Accord. Argentina is reluctant to abandon the work done in Bali and thinks that associating itself with the Accord will do just that. Basualdo also mentioned the GoA's attempt to align its response with the G-77 and hesitancy to diverge from that body. In a follow-on conversation, Basualdo was interested to hear about the positive response the USG has received from other countries in the region. The only point on which Basualdo expressed certainty was Argentina's aversion to accept domestic targets or actions in the Accord Appendix at this time.

¶3. (SBU) Blanco was less circumspect when he and two members of his team met with ESTH Counselor and ESTHoff on January 27. He said that both the Foreign Minister and Environment Secretary do not support association with the Accord. He also viewed the Accord as a "parallel track" to the Kyoto-Bali agreements that would detract from that work, and saw it as "unbalanced" in both the mitigation and financing sections. He expressed strong concern that the document was abandoning prior agreements (while admitting that the Kyoto Protocol has not worked) and that it failed to address the important issue of historic responsibility for emissions.

¶4. (SBU) Blanco was also clearly displeased with the process under which the Accord was written and the general tone of the document: "If this is a political document, its tone is in error," he said. He also noted that as a legal document the Accord leaves too many points unclear, and he disagreed that Argentina in any way gave its implicit support to the document in Copenhagen. He said that while a few countries objected, Argentina and many others stayed silent, neither objecting to or giving their support to the Accord.

15. (SBU) Blanco pressed ESTHOffs on why the January 31 deadline was necessary. Argentina and other countries will continue to play a role in any future negotiations through the UN fora, he said, "so why is this Accord necessary to keep working?" He posited that if Argentina associates in April or May, or even does not join at all, it will still be part of the next round of negotiations. When ESTH Counselor explained that association was important to gain global unity on the Accord as a basis for a future legal agreement, Blanco said that Kyoto and Bali already provide a basis on which to negotiate. He said that Argentina considers itself engaged on climate change and will continue to do so, regardless of whether it is part of the Copenhagen Accord.

16. (SBU) Comment: Although no formal decision has been made, both Basualdo and Blanco doubted that Argentina would join the Accord by the January 31 deadline. Association after that date is also by no means certain. Many top decision makers, including Chief Negotiator Silvia Meregá, are on holiday for the Argentine summer and do not appear to be participating in the analysis and discussion of the Accord. For their part, both Basualdo and Blanco emphasized that they still had too many doubts about the political/legal nature of the Accord and its effect on the basic UNFCCC framework, as well as (unspecified) concerns about the mitigation and financing content of the accord. While it is possible that the Argentines may just be waiting to see what other countries (especially in South America) do before deciding on association, direct engagement at the policy level to address their concerns appears to be the only hope to bring the GoA on board.

End comment.
MARTINEZ